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Physical Security and Stockpile Management

Physical security and stockpile management is quickly becoming one of the most pressing threat-reduction issues the United States and other countries must address. Aging stockpiles of conventional weapons and increasingly unstable munitions from the Cold War or earlier pose a serious threat in many countries that no longer have a national-security need for them.

by F. David Diaz [PM/WRA]



82mm pile of mortars ready to be destroyed.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WILLIAM WADE, STERLING INTERNATIONAL, LLC

Aging or unstable stockpiles pose the dual threats of illicit proliferation and accidental explosion. Poorly secured weapons and munitions stockpiles are often attractive targets for terrorists, criminals and insurgent groups. The weapons may spread rapidly, destabilizing individual countries or even an entire region. The munitions can sometimes explode, causing humanitarian disasters that serve as major public-safety hazards in popu-

lated areas, as well as creating an environmental threat. The world has watched stockpiles detonate, at times due to poor handling practices, causing large numbers of casualties and significant damage that has displaced many civilians. In one recent example, 26 people were killed and many more were injured and displaced when a stockpile exploded at an ammunition dismantling factory in Gërdec, Albania, in March 2008.¹

To help prevent illicit proliferation and accidental explosion, governments must maintain high standards of security and management for state-controlled stockpiles of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS), other small arms/light weapons and related ammunition. Governments must see PSSM as an ongoing effort that requires frequent monitoring, regular training of qualified experts, and long-term planning for factors like infrastructure and resources. Implementing such standards helps ensure security, enhance stability and enable prosperity.



MANPADS (SA 7s) being prepared for destruction in Montenegro.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KEN UNDERWOOD, EOD SOLUTIONS

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) assists countries with essential pieces of the PSSM puzzle: safely reducing excess stockpiles of weapons and munitions, and improving security and safety infrastructure for retained stocks. Coordinating with the U.S. Embassy in the host country and the United States Defense Threat Reduction Agency, PM/WRA works with governments to assess needs and devise a comprehensive and efficient plan that addresses both the destruction of excess stocks and projects to improve PSSM infrastructure.

While the United States is one of several countries that provides assistance with stockpile reduction and security infrastructure, numerous multilateral organizations have established mechanisms to help governments implement these commitments. The United Nations, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe are among the organizations that have established venues where states can collaborate to improve PSSM procedures. ♣

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